

The  
Confessions  
of a Newspaper

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DR. GOLDWIN SMITH






# THE CONFESSIONS OF A NEWSPAPER

PUBLISHED FOR THE  
EDUCATION OF THE  
PEOPLE—AND  
THEIR

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*The* CONFESSIONS  
of A NEWSPAPER

Published for the  
Information of Its  
Friends—and Enemies

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# Some Searching Questions

A KEEN INQUIRY INTO THE POLICY  
AND AIMS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN

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*November 16, 1908.*

*To the Editor of The North American.*



YOU may regard this letter as impertinent or even offensive. I assure you that I do not intend to be offensive, and I do not think that I am impertinent. The North American is not in any sense a private institution, notwithstanding property rights or legal titles.

No newspaper which even pretends to fulfil its mission in our scheme of civilization can hold itself as a private concern into the management and course of which the public has no right to inquire.

Even in the very constitutions of our state and nation the public functions of a free press are recognized. Special privileges are granted and special duties imposed. These carry with them special responsibilities to the people.

We cannot blindly accept the action of a newspaper and indorse its motives as a censor of public officers and civic morals if we have not confidence in its controlling force.

And it is because my faith in the controlling force of The North American sometimes wavers that I write this letter to you. It is not for publication, although I have no objection to



your putting it in print if you see fit. I am sure it expresses the attitude of thousands of your readers who have stuck to you for the obvious good that you do, although often mystified by your course and never fully satisfied that your motives are what you apparently wish we should believe them to be.

What is *The North American's* aim? Is it purely and simply a commercial venture, and as such exploiting the credibility of a chivalrous and virtuous following? Do you believe in the things you preach, and if you do, do you always practice them?

Are you honest in your zeal for the public, or are you following your particular line because you find it easier to make your paper pay through that means than some other? Are you consistent, and if you are, why do you seem so inconsistent that at times you shock your best friends?

Are these questions impertinent? Do they seem irrelevant? Let me tell you why I put them to you.

I have been a reader of *The North American* ever since it became *The North American* as we know it today, eight or nine years ago. When it seemed as if at last the honest citizenship of this city and state were to have a champion I rejoiced. There were many things about your paper in its earlier days that jarred my preconceived notions of dignified journalism, but I overlooked them; or, rather, took them with the rest—with the good that I thought you were doing in exposing the corruption at the root of our political life.

But my faith was sorely shaken for a time when you carried your warfare into the business institutions of the city, and, in what at the time seemed to me to be scurrilous cartoons and articles, you blackened the characters of men who then as now stand foremost among the city's respected leaders of financial enterprise. However, as your campaign unfolded itself I saw



that you had enough cause to justify your questioning of their methods, though I have ever doubted your right to impugn their motives. And the point arose, in my mind, Might not your political attitude be as exaggerated as your assumption of superior business virtue seemed to be?

But you were the voice crying in the wilderness, and I had to listen.

You led the reform forces to victory in 1905, and then you did an unheard-of thing. With the gang beaten and in rout, you proposed that the reformers instead of destroying the forces of evil should capture them and turn them into a reform army. After you had taught us to abhor the Republican organization of Philadelphia, you asked us to try to turn it to good use, as if so degraded a thing could have any good in it.

As the result of the triumph of your aims, the most drastic reform legislation ever passed at any single session of any legislative body in the history of the nation was put through at Harrisburg. And then you hung up your sword and buckler and announced that you were out of politics.

Probably because the people couldn't get along without you, you were back in politics before the next election, but can you blame us if the strange proceeding suggested ambitions, deals or promises?

Still you were the only voice that had the character to command a hearing, and we had to listen. And we still listen, though always with that fear of the mystery that envelops your action.

We cannot but ask why you should have more zeal for the public good than other newspapers. Is it only a question of profits, and if you were facing heavy losses as the result of your course, would you still be on the side of decency?

Sometimes you condemn political leaders unsparingly, and then we find you fighting shoulder to shoulder with the same men for a common purpose. It is true that in such instances you are still on the side of righteousness, but wouldn't it be better to win such battles without alliance with discredited forces?

And then your business policies—your assumption of deciding the merits of all matters seeking space in your advertising columns. And we cannot but remember that when you were young—and presumably weak—you accepted business that you now reject with a great flourish of virtue. You carried Lawson's advertising for years, and as soon as he sought to bring his schemes to a definite turn you threw him out and denounced him editorially.

You came out for local option and made no disguise of your antagonism to the liquor trade, and at the same time let it be known that you would take all the liquor advertising offered. Maybe you have since drawn the line, for I see no such "ads" in your columns. But the whole business was mystifying to me.

The North American taught me to admire Bryan as the champion of the very things for which you were fighting in public life, and when the test came you threw your influence on the side of the party of Cannon and Aldrich.

None of these things may seem to be concrete enough to found a case upon, but the whole course of The North American seems like a paradox, always in the right, but ever showing such toleration for things that seem wrong. Are you in earnest? What is The North American? What is its guiding principle? At what do you aim? Why have you adopted your unique course? How, with thousands such as I in frequent doubt, do you keep us in line? How make it pay?



I do not expect an answer to these questions, but my attachment for you, my approval of you and my disapproval of so many things that you do have impelled me to write. F.

North Sixty-third street, Oct. 20.

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[Note.—The foregoing letter, received several weeks ago, has interested us, not because it is unique, but because it embraces so many sides of a question that is continually being put to us. While it may not be possible to reply satisfactorily to every one of our friend's queries, we have decided to take up the subject in a general way. Tomorrow morning we will print the first of a series of editorials on The North American, its policies, purposes and the measure of success they have attained, all of which seem to be so mystifying to our friend who wrote the above letter, as well as to thousands of others.—Editor.]





# A Frank Discussion of The North American's Policy and Its Results

HOW THIS NEWSPAPER HAS BEEN GUIDED, THE  
VICTORIES IT HAS WON, THE LOSSES SUFFERED

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November 17, 1908.



*THE NORTH AMERICAN* received some time ago, and published yesterday, a letter which asked some very searching questions about this newspaper's past course, present condition and purposes for the future.

*"What is The North American's aim?" demanded this reader. "Do you believe in the things you preach, and if you do, do you always practice them? \* \* \* Are you in earnest? What is The North American? What is its guiding principle? How do you make it pay?"*

*Laid aside during the stress of the presidential campaign, this letter was taken up later, and since it expresses with discrimination and earnestness questions which have frequently been heard, it will be answered fully in four editorials.*

*The first of these editorials is printed herewith.*



**D**URING the nine years of its new life The North American's policy and purposes have been studied by its friends and foes alike, and it has received many inquiries as to what it aims to accomplish. Newspaper editors and proprietors particularly have been interested, since they have always recognized that this journal is unique—that nine years ago it entered upon an untried experiment, and that in success or failure it would make its own precedents.

The reader who expressed in a letter published yesterday a keen and intelligent interest in The North American's aims acknowledged that he had not been able always to understand its course, nor to estimate the extent and permanence of its success. He is typical of many. And that the desire to know is widespread is shown by frequent requests from magazines for an explanatory statement.

The experiment long ago advanced to the point of assured demonstration, and The North American is able now to discuss fully and frankly the policy which has governed it, the checks it has suffered and the success it has won. We purpose to tell the story in our own columns rather than elsewhere, and to address all our readers as well as those whose interest is commercial or professional.

We shall explain, first, the policy, or rules of conduct, which The North American adopted upon entering its new career; and then we shall disclose the highly interesting results of that policy—what it has done for the community and for humanity, the strange enmities it has made, the heavy losses



it has involved and the great, successful force it has created. We venture to say that the recital will prove illuminating not only to men who conduct newspapers, but to all readers who are concerned in moral and material progress.

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In the most general terms, the policy of *The North American* has been to stand for liberty, for equal opportunity, for charity and for uplifting.

An instant criticism of this statement will be that the program, far from being unique, is deadly commonplace. All newspapers uphold these principles. There is none so wicked as deliberately to fight against liberty or equal opportunity, none so base as to despise charity and the uplifting of men.

But *The North American* is different because it has stood for these things in practice as well as in theory. Its success, which has attracted and puzzled experienced newspaper men the country over, has come not merely through having a policy, but through having a policy and living up to it—living up to it in the face of organized opposition, desperate assaults, the estrangement of friends and heavy handicaps in business. This is not a virtuous boast, but a statement of fact.

What the policy means, and how it affects the public and the newspaper, will appear as the experiences of *The North American* are unfolded in detail. But a brief statement here will explain it in part.

*The North American* stands for liberty in its fullest sense, and that, of course, includes good government; indeed, it means good government. This paper has upheld the principles of liberty in the United States, in the Philippines, in Cuba, in South Africa and in Ireland. It has fought for them unceasingly in Pennsylvania and in Philadelphia.

It stands for equal opportunity among communities and among men; hence it fights against discriminations in law and business. But it does not stand for equality of rewards. The important thing is to guarantee equal opportunity; reward must depend upon individual skill, energy and ability.

It is for charity, for helping those who are too weak to help themselves. Not because charity idealizes life or covers the sins of civilization, but because while faulty conditions exist there must always be with us many who are helpless, and it is our solemn duty to do what we can to raise them up and make their lives a little easier.

And it is for the uplifting of men through the improvement of their physical surroundings. There are many noble agencies which seek to save the souls of men. The North American will be satisfied if it can help to save their bodies, for it believes that the message of religion can best find access to the minds of men when they are freed from the distraction of poverty and pain.

To brighten the life of a child and win it back from sickness to health; to spread the doctrines of right living and aid in the magnificent campaign of science against death; to fight ignorance and negligence and greed, which create conditions that invite disease—it is through work like this that The North American aims to benefit humanity by bettering material conditions.

The consistent and ceaseless advancement of such a policy by a newspaper is, we say, unique. We should be the last to assert that newspapers as a rule are not conducted honestly and do not seek to benefit the communities in which they exist. But men in this trade all over the country are our witnesses that The North American has gone farther than any other in establishing a rule of conduct which meets every question, in laboring for the good of humanity and in maintaining this



policy undeviatingly through the stress of business competition and the reprisals of those whom it offends.

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Since we have engaged to tell the whole truth about this experiment of ours and its success, we shall make no apology for introducing a personal discussion. It should be understood, however, that these frank remarks are addressed not so much to the public as to newspaper proprietors and editors throughout the country, who have studied *The North American's* progress and have asked for an explanation of its aims.

For their benefit we ask and answer the question: What must be the attitude and viewpoint and rule of conduct of the editors and managers of a paper with such a policy as *The North American's*?

First, it is obvious that on such a newspaper the management is not in control, but is controlled. The editors are not the moulders of the policy, but are creatures of it. They must, therefore, believe in it, heart and soul. They must regard it as more important than success, and its maintenance as a sacred trust. They must be ready to suffer for it, if need be.

They must love justice for its own sake and hate wrong because it is wrong, otherwise their work would be hypocrisy and life a burden. They must seek always the good of the masses, and regard little the fortunes of individuals. They must be merciful to those who fall through human frailty, but merciless to those who commit wrongs for profit or selfish greed.

They must measure every man by his worth, by what he can and does accomplish for the common good, and not by his standing in the community and his social or business influence. They must have few intimates and no desire for social honors, nor any entangling alliances of a financial or political or social

nature. The more intimate pleasures of club life they must renounce, and much of the cheerful intercourse which men enjoy is denied them; for they cannot, in common decency, practice "good fellowship" with men whose schemes it may be their duty to oppose in the public interest.

They must, indeed, live lives of isolation, for they cannot serve the masses and their own ease. And they must adapt their methods to the aims sought, taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves and enlisting aid where they can get it, whether or not they can approve of all the things for which their temporary allies may stand.

Let it not be imagined, however, that they should feel oppressed by a sense of too conscious virtue, or that life to them need be a desert waste of unpleasant duty. On the contrary, with their devotion to the principles for which they stand they should have a lively appreciation of their own imperfections; and, above all, they must possess an inextinguishable sense of humor, which will enable them to accept their failures with cheerfulness and their successes with moderation.



# The North American's Policy: What It Means to It and to the Public

INFORMATIVE, CORRECTIVE AND  
CONSTRUCTIVE WORK DEMANDED  
FOR THE GOOD OF THE COMMUNITY

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*November 18, 1908.*



IN THIS heart-to-heart talk with our readers we have explained as clearly as abstract discussion may the policy and purposes of The North American and the character of work which a newspaper of this kind demands from those who conduct it. A natural question now is: Given such a policy, and men who believe in it and carry it out, what does the newspaper become? What function does it perform in the community which it aims to serve?

It stands, as we have said, for liberty in its broadest sense; for equal opportunity, for charity and for the material uplifting of men. Obviously, it can represent no individual or clique, no creed or faction or party.

No partisan or economic controversy can arise big enough to enlist it in the selfish interest of one side or the other. In

all public questions it represents the third party—the people. It becomes an ever-vigilant sentinel, the instant champion of right and foe of wrong, the hope of the oppressed and the terror of the evildoer, the best beloved and most sincerely hated agency of civilization.

It is a court before which offenders against the public interest are tried and condemned—not a court of individuals claiming the right to judge their fellows, but the court of public opinion, the voice which speaks the verdict of the masses. Other courts may fail to do justice, through defects in the law or otherwise; but through the newspaper of this kind the people give judgment which is true and which prevails.

Above all, the people look to it as the one agency which never lays down its arms, which is always on guard, always ready for the fray. They turn to it instinctively when their rights are assailed. They know that it is always interested. It cannot always win, but while such a newspaper exists there can be no final surrender to wrong. The fight must always go on.

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But what is the use of it all? What actual good does such a journal accomplish in the community?

Its first and foremost function is to be informative. It has a power which no other agency possesses—to give the people facts, to arm them with knowledge. It lays bare crimes of cunning as well as crimes of violence. It is the only power which can and does strip the cloak of secrecy from subtly devised wrong. Under our form of government there is no other instrument which protects the people against such aggression; which searches into unworthy schemes and forewarns the peo-



ple of their danger; which exploits public questions, dissects public policies and informs the people of the aims of parties.

It will even employ experts to find out and disclose plans which threaten the public interest. And it not only gives the resulting knowledge to its own readers, but by the force of its example compels other newspapers to do the same, and to aid good causes which through interest or indolence they would neglect.

Secondly, the influence of a newspaper of this kind must be corrective. Evils and abuses, some small, some great, grow up on every hand. The rights of individuals and the rights of the public are constantly being undermined through ignorance, and assailed by craft and greed. The newspaper with a helpful policy must ever be vigilant to warn and ready to fight against these attacks.

In this respect it can correct evils which are not reached by any other agency. Without entering into specific details, we cite from actual experiences of *The North American* what a publication with such a policy can actually accomplish in this direction.

It can so inform and arouse public opinion as to drive from the ticket of the dominant political party a man unworthy of support or confidence. It can expose systematic crime against the ballot, though protected by powerful influences, and force the arrest of the criminals and their exile or imprisonment; and, more, compel the adoption of laws which wipe out the monstrous evil and assure to the people the right of pure elections, for years invaded with impunity by a despotic political organization.

It can uncover and smash financial schemes conceived in fraud, yet luring the people with specious falsehoods—schemes of theft hidden by crafty imitation of investment and protected

by the complaisance of interests which should be ashamed to permit their existence. It can recover hundreds of thousands of dollars for duped investors, and supply evidence which puts the thieves behind prison bars.

It can defend public rights and property from the raids of powerful financial interests, arousing the people with warnings when their franchises are in danger, and leading in the rescue of them from those who would enslave present and future generations for their own profit.

It can stand as the guardian of the people's treasury against designing greed, and insure at least that stealing shall be done in the full light of publicity. It can protect the people's interests when corporations would exploit public utilities for private gain, without recognizing their obligations to those from whom their power is drawn. And it can check, through the power of publicity, policies of discrimination by which great interests would reduce the transportation facilities of the community and so retard its progress.

It can halt the grasping schemes of illegal combinations, save the people from conspiracies to raise the price of necessities and bring the conspirators to the doors of prison. It can expose the frauds in doctored and falsely branded food products, and by actual demonstration of the evils create a public opinion which writes remedial legislation.

It can uncover the designs of predatory interests, informing the people as to where and how their prosperity is endangered through influences which would control the public wealth, and carrying the fight for justice into the very halls of Congress.

These are some of the accomplishments within the power of a newspaper which maintains a policy like *The North American's*. They are cited from its own record.



But let this be observed: the maintenance of such a policy demands far more than fidelity to principle and aggressive publicity. It demands practical work. The newspaper must not only warn and advise, but, if needs be, must perform the duties which derelict or indolent officers fail to perform. It must, if necessary, gather evidence and initiate prosecutions; raise large sums of money to check the schemes of powerful combinations; exert its influence for the selection of good men for office, and press the laws which the public interest demands upon the legislatures of the state and nation.

A journal which preaches justice and righteousness, and does no actual work to advance them, discredits itself though it be ever so eloquent. The newspaper which adopts a policy such as we have outlined must be prepared to do more than offer warning and admonition; it must expend money and time and energy in performing real service in aiding the work which it calls upon the people to do.

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Finally, and most important of all, the policy must be constructive. The informative and corrective features are merely preparatory. Helpful in themselves, they are of little real service unless the newspaper has definite aims for building up as well as tearing down; unless it is willing and able to accomplish permanent good for the community in addition to fighting evil.

It is a great thing to expose ballot-box stuffing and arrest the criminals; it is a greater thing to compel the passage of laws which guarantee pure elections—at least until such time as criminals devise new though more perilous forms of fraud. Good is accomplished through the disclosures of corporation wrongs against a city; but much more through the creating of legislation which will help restore the city's commercial pres-

tige. All honestly conducted journals are informative and corrective to a certain extent; the exceptional newspaper finds its greatest opportunity in maintaining a policy of constructiveness.

Indeed, a newspaper which adopts a policy like that of *The North American* openly assumes such responsibility. It must recognize an obligation not only to guard the interests of the public from spoliation, but to advance them by practical improvement, and to take an active part in the uplifting of the community and the betterment of the material welfare of the inhabitants.

In pursuing this aim it works, first, with and through public sentiment. By its treatment of public questions it crystallizes this sentiment, the overwhelming power of which, if properly directed, it demonstrates to the people. A newspaper which has the confidence of its readers actually creates a demand for better conditions, and achieves them through the force of public opinion which it brings into being.

The field for constructive work is well-nigh limitless. There are always needs for the advancement of the community's political and commercial interests, for public rights suffer from neglect and public property is alienated for private exploitation. There are, too, the broad questions of material uplifting through the steady improvement of conditions of living.

A newspaper like *The North American* must devote itself to these affairs with unflagging energy. It must be interested when others are indifferent and aggressive when others seek compromise. It must press its demands for the common good against selfish opposition and maintain always the right of the whole people against the rights of the few. It must take a broad view of questions and work for the future, not the present.



It commits itself to an unceasing campaign for the development of trade and commerce. Particularly its efforts will be to foster the material growth of the section which is its field, first by opposing the aggression of grasping interests and, second, by working for practical improvements. But it must also aid in all similar movements which are national or international in their scope.

It must, for example, fight unremittingly for equal opportunity to all in matters of transportation and against discriminations which handicap some individuals or communities for the benefit of others. It must agitate for better financial laws, for good roads, for improved waterways, for the preservation of natural resources and for the development of the intricate system of facilities by which commerce is handled.

Charity is among the first of the duties which a newspaper of this kind undertakes. In this it must know no creed or race, but only the appeal of the helpless. It does not regard charity, however beneficent, as a cure for economic evils or an excuse for conditions which make poverty, but merely as an obligation from the strong toward the weak.

It aims, moreover, to make charity bless those who give as well as those who receive; for it works through the young, teaches them to help those less fortunate than themselves and schools them in a realization of what they owe to their fellows. The boys and girls whose interests it enlists will be better men and women for learning that the greatest pleasure in life is the helping of others.

To work for the doctrine of better living and for the preservation of the public health, which mean a better chance in life for the individual, is another duty of the highest importance. A newspaper which embraces such a policy must understand the close relation between poverty and crime, between health

and morals. Experience has taught that the improvement of physical surroundings and conditions is a distinct aid to moral growth; even the churches are beginning to recognize that distress of body is an obstacle to the arousing of religious or ethical interest.

Therefore, the newspaper aims to teach right living because that leads to good citizenship, peace and prosperity. It preaches the doctrine of sanitation, fights for pure food, pure water and pure air, and keeps always before those stricken with curable disease the hope of restoration to health and usefulness.

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In all these things, we say again, the newspaper of this kind must go far beyond recording news. All newspapers disseminate information and keep their readers in touch with the development of public questions. A journal like *The North American* must do more. It must create public sentiment, organize movements, raise funds, formulate legislation, work for appropriations and conduct a practical campaign for each good cause.

It must be willing to stand alone when once convinced that its course is right. It must have convictions on all public questions, and maintain them in the face of misrepresentation. It must prize character and consistency above popularity.

To be informative, corrective and, most of all, constructive—this is the sum of the work. Of its penalties and rewards we shall speak again.



# The North American's Policy and Its Curious Effects on Circulation

HOW AGGRESSIVE PUBLICITY IN GOOD CAUSES  
CREATES ENMITIES, BUT FINALLY WINS SUPPORT

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*November 19, 1908.*



WE HAVE discussed at considerable length the policy which governs The North American and the function which it aims to perform in the community. We intend now to give the other side of the shield—to describe with the utmost frankness what have been the fortunes of the newspaper which has maintained this policy, neither minimizing the losses it has suffered nor exaggerating the successes it has won.

We are certain that all our readers will be interested in these disclosures, but our remarks will be directed particularly to newspaper editors and proprietors, who have been professionally interested in The North American's experience, and as investors in newspaper property are curious to know the results.

Some of them, by the way, and many other keen business men prophesied disaster. They congratulated The North

American upon its courage in adopting such a policy, and admitted that it might maintain the high standard for a time; but they predicted that devotion to principle would not be able to stand concentrated attack upon the circulation and advertising patronage. They were right in foreseeing losses. As to their views upon the final result, *The North American* of today is the answer.

When *The North American* was acquired by the present management, a little more than nine years ago, it had—though the oldest daily newspaper in the United States—about 2500 regular readers. Its very existence was known to comparatively few Philadelphians. And today the actual paid daily circulation of *The North American* is more than 160,000.

But these figures, conclusive as they are, do not adequately tell the story. The progress of *The North American* must be compared with that of the other newspapers during the same period.

Nine years ago, then, *The North American's* paying readers numbered less than 3000. The two leading papers of the city had about 140,000 circulation each. A third, with the prestige of a successful career and association with a man of national prominence, had 60,000. A fourth newspaper, of long-established reputation and selling at 2 cents, had more than 90,000 circulation. Later, it absorbed another with about 60,000, and reduced the price of the combination to 1 cent. The amalgamated journal has fallen below 70,000.

In the nine years *The North American* overtook and distanced all its rivals. It gained nearly 160,000 subscribers while the two leading papers of nine years ago were gaining 20,000, and while the others actually lost ground. For two years it led them all, and has been passed temporarily only by one, which made a spurt during the presidential campaign.



There is another item of significance. The Sunday North American was started two years and a half after the new daily. It had to fight its way against two old-established 5-cent Sunday papers—one of them with national influence—and a strong 2-cent paper and several unimportant issues. Today the circulation of the Sunday North American is nearly as large as that of the daily. It stands second in the list of Sunday newspapers. That which was the strongest nine years ago is now in fourth place, and a new Sunday issue, now selling at 5 cents, has made hardly a ripple on the journalistic waters.

There is still another feature to be noted. The foregoing comparisons are on a net basis, and with morning newspapers, which have relatively small street sales, most of the papers being delivered to homes. Even more impressive is comparison with the growth of evening papers. With their large street sales and their successive daily editions duplicated in each section covered, three evening papers have not made great gains. One has lost heavily, another has reduced its price from 3 cents to 1 cent; that which advertises the largest gains has increased about one-third as much as The North American.

These facts ought to be a sufficient answer to those who ask how The North American's experiment has resulted.

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Experts in the newspaper business are keen to learn how The North American made and won its supremacy in circulation. We shall discuss the methods as clearly as we can, and shall be just as frank about our losses as our gains.

As every observer knows, The North American is the most consistent and persistent newspaper "crusader" in the country—that is, a newspaper which conducts campaigns in its columns to inform and arouse public opinion upon important questions. These special activities are a logical outcome of its policy as

we have explained it. Our belief in the early days was that crusades created circulation. We can now state positively, from experience and observation, that they do not directly have that effect. However popular the cause represented in a crusade may be, the agitation does not of itself add to the lists of readers.

There is, sometimes, a temporary extra sale, but it is insignificant in extent, and soon evaporates. On the other hand, all crusades are against powerful interests or ingrained habits of life, and those whose profits or personal desires are assailed temporarily turn against the newspaper and make systematic warfare against its circulation and influence.

Corporations and men who profit through intrenched evil or persistent defiance of the public good naturally resent being called to account by a newspaper, and naturally strike back when their schemes are attacked. Those who through ignorance menace the public health by practices almost hallowed by custom resent being forced to change their methods. Those whose habits of life endanger not only themselves but their families and their neighbors resent public admonition. Those who are actively bad citizens through alliance with corrupt politics, and those who are passive bad citizens through soggy indifference, alike resent the persistent attacks which reduce the gains of one class and disrupt the comfortable self-esteem of the other.

Experience has demonstrated that every crusade, however much in the public interest it may be, raises up against the newspaper an army of critics and enemies, who work temporarily to injure its circulation and often do make a slight impression. A careful record shows but one exception to this rule, which will be discussed later. This of itself refutes the silly charge sometimes made that a newspaper crusade for the



public good is merely "a scheme to boom circulation" and "to make money."

And yet, paradoxical as it may seem, The North American's crusades, which at first we thought would aid circulation, but discovered later were a detriment, have in the end contributed greatly to creating the force which has made the paper's circulation supremacy.

Of course, The North American has always had the basic strength of a good newspaper—a vehicle which presents the news fully, accurately and attractively. Newspaper experts regard it in this respect as a model. But other journals are also good. The North American has something more than news power to recommend it to the public.

That something is Character. It is shown in the belief of supporters and critics, friends and foes, those who admire its forceful independence and those who resent it and detest its methods, that this newspaper is honest.

Character has made and held the circulation of The North American, and is adding to it day by day. There can be no other explanation for its growth. Its character has impressed itself upon the public mind. It is a unique institution; it stands for ideas, ideals and methods which no other paper stands for. It is not universally liked, but it is universally trusted. The bitterest opponents of its policy look to it for fair, fearless discussion of public questions. Confidence in it is a habit.

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Thus we may trace to the same source the weakness and the strength of The North American, the influences for and against its circulation. If this seems contradictory, let us specify some of the kinds of active opposition which its course creates.

All who benefit through intrenched evils in politics are enemies of such a paper—every crooked contractor, every protected wrongdoer, every derelict or dishonest public official, every member or hanger-on of the organization which they control. One notorious Mayor of Philadelphia made it a condition for holding appointive office under him that the incumbent should work to exterminate *The North American*. This official was a prototype of the Clays and O'Learys of today.

Officers and friends of corporations which wrong the public temporarily array themselves against a newspaper which obstructs their schemes. In the great coal strike six years ago *The North American*, representing the public, fought to compel arbitration, and earned the enmity of powerful railroad interests.

*The North American's* successful war on the railroad pass evil not only annoyed the officials, but embittered thousands who had profited by the graft. Its exposure of the corporate influences which retard the development of the port rouses the enmity of those responsible. Financial interests which send their depositors' funds to Wall street for stock gamblers' interests, while home manufacturers must go to New York to raise money for their legitimate business, resent being told that they are dishonorable and that their influence is a blight upon the community.

*The North American's* exposure of the Asphalt Trust swindle some years ago raised up another little army of enemies. The eminently respectable perpetrators of that wrong, powerful in finance and with many sycophantic followers, did their best to destroy the newspaper's influence and cut its circulation.

Manufacturers of fraudulent, doped and misbranded products were made bitter by *The North American's* revela-



tions of the oleomargarine swindle and its ceaseless campaign against food poisoning.

Each of these classes was a center of opposition, spreading its adverse influence. When officers of big corporations denounced *The North American* as anarchistic—for advocating reforms which they have since adopted—they led with them their subordinates and business men who could be cajoled or coerced. When financiers assailed the paper, each had his clique of little bankers and brokers and stock gamblers to echo the cry.

Nor was it only in public affairs that *The North American* stirred up opposition. Campaigns against ignorance and negligence never made friends. The farmer resented being told that some of the practices accepted for generations were dangerous to public health, and communities were angered when called to account for polluting streams. Even efforts to instil the doctrines of right living and encourage precautions against disease aroused resentment. Isolation and registration of consumptives, vaccination, seclusion of victims of contagious maladies—all these were advocated at the cost of good feeling from those concerned.

The most helpful crusade ever undertaken by *The North American* is that against tuberculosis. It is nearest to our hearts, because it means the saving of lives, the restoring to usefulness of many who are helpless and the final extinction of the most dreaded enemy of mankind. Pennsylvania has taken the lead in the warfare upon the disease, and *The North American* has aided in the fight. If we had done nothing else, we should feel that we had not tried in vain to serve the public. Yet we doubt whether today there exists upon this score any feeling of gratitude or friendship which reduces itself to circulation.

Finally, not to extend too far this survey of the enemies which a newspaper like *The North American* raises up, there is the citizen of sodden respectability, who earned for Philadelphia the description "corrupt and contented." He regards as a personal affront the policy which will acknowledge no surrender to political evil, and which everlastingly is bothering about public wrongs and public improvements. Wedded to tradition, careful of his conduct and supremely self-satisfied, he abhors vitality as something indecent, and grows apoplectic with angry amazement when told that instead of being a pillar of respectable citizenship he is a supporter of corruption and an obstacle to progress.

A policy like this, which aims to serve the general welfare, must sometimes hurt individuals, and even destroy reputations when that is necessary to advance a good cause. Those who are hurt cry out, and complain bitterly to their friends and their friends' friends, and all strike back at the newspaper which has offended them. The most skeptical can see now how absurd it is to say that a journal which agitates against evils or in behalf of projects for the public good is "only trying to make circulation." No crusade ever directly made circulation—with the exception of the fight for local option, which has won and held a host of friends.

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Yet in spite of all these adverse influences, *The North American* has won and held the leadership in its field. The crusades which were no direct aid to circulation have indirectly created and steadily increased it. The explanation, as we have noted, is the character which the paper has made and which it holds in the public mind. Those temporarily alienated have



come to realize, many of them, that the paper is doing the best it can for the whole people; and they have seen it waging good fights in which their interests have not been assailed; and they have seen it pursuing a course which no opposition has been able to swerve and in which enmity has found no dishonor. So they have come back as readers, if not as friends. They may not wholly like *The North American*, nor subscribe to all its views, but they respect it, and habitually look to it for the final word upon questions of public import.

But back of these, outnumbering them a thousand-fold, are the people of the community—a great army of the sober and intelligent and prosperous citizenship, whose confidence in *The North American* is implicit and whose steady support of it makes the solid growth of circulation.





# The North American's Policy Costs \$100,000 a Year, But It's Worth It

LARGE PROFIT SHOWN DESPITE LOST ADVERTISING WHICH HONOR EXCLUDES OR ENMITY WITHHOLDS

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*November 20, 1908.*



COME now to a discussion of the effect upon advertising patronage of such a policy as The North American's. This is a matter of some importance, since advertising is the main support of a newspaper; without a certain amount of this revenue-producing business, indeed, a newspaper could not exist, much less maintain a policy.

It may be stated at once that in The North American organization the policy governs the business office as absolutely as it governs the editorial rooms. It censors the advertising columns, and rigidly excludes some of the most profitable kinds of advertising. We purpose to reveal now what this practice involves in losses and gains.

The North American when it passed to the present management, nine years ago, had very little advertising. Having

also a small circulation, it started its new career under all the handicaps that weight an untried newspaper venture. At first no attempt was made to interest business men, but as the circulation grew to figures where advertising could honestly be solicited, the paper sought it.

We acknowledge frankly that at that time the standards of our policy were not strictly applied to the advertising columns. We considered duty done when the news and editorial departments were guided and controlled by it. We took it for granted that there must be some good reason, some moral justification, for the fact that all newspapers, even the most reputable, printed advertisements of doubtful honesty, and even of flagrant dishonesty. We found that newspapers were regarded, so far as advertising space was concerned, as "common carriers," and were held to be under no legal or moral obligation to close their columns to disreputable concerns, or to protect their readers from offensive announcements and fraudulent schemes.

This was the universal view. "The newspaper," we heard, "is, in its advertising space, a public vehicle for the transmission of commercial propositions to the public. How can it be expected to examine into every proposition offered? Why should it be called upon to protect grown men and women? What right has it to assume a censorship over business?"

But as *The North American* grew in circulation and influence it became noticeable that there was discordance between its policy and some of its advertising. It dawned upon us that the newspaper which permitted questionable schemes to use its columns was in part responsible for the injury done to those whose confidence it sought. What startled us chiefly was that a specially alluring advertisement in *The North American* would probably appeal most to the very readers who had the greatest



trust in the paper. From that time offensive and shady advertisements were cleaned out of *The North American's* columns, never to reappear.

We realized that even these advertisers had certain rights, based upon long acceptance of their announcements by newspapers, hence we excluded them quietly, without calling attention to the fact, and permitted less scrupulous newspapers to gather in increased revenue.

From that time our advertising columns have been censored as strictly as our editorial columns. Many newspapers, it has been said, are edited from the business office. *The North American* is unique in having its business office controlled by its editorial policy.

Questionable medical advertisements were the first to be sifted. A remedy which is advertised is not necessarily a cheat; but some are notorious; they are not only fraudulent, but harmful. The worst of them, perhaps, are the most profitable. Columns of their advertisements are still to be found in supposedly reputable newspapers. The pages of *The North American* are closed to them.

There is another class of medical advertising which need not be described except to say that it is absolutely unfit for publication. This, of course, is barred from *The North American*, although it is eagerly accepted by other newspapers, and appears in offensive proximity to the advertisements of reputable business houses.

Next the standard of *The North American's* policy was applied to financial announcements. Financial advertising is profitable, and by most newspapers is accepted indiscriminately. Investors are credited with having caution and judgment, and are supposed to inquire into propositions offered to them. Following the general custom, *The North American* for a short

time permitted financial advertisers to speak for themselves, and did not undertake the onerous and delicate task of probing the honesty and value of investment schemes projected through its columns.

But it was learned that readers were buying shares in doubtful propositions chiefly because they were exploited in *The North American*, and because they had confidence in everything, news and advertising, which this newspaper published. From that time a rigid censorship was enforced, and no promoter can buy space in *The North American* unless his character and the character of his investment plan will stand the closest scrutiny.

There are hundreds of columns of advertising of this kind printed in other newspapers every year, most of which is offered to and rejected by *The North American*, and all of which we could obtain by solicitation. So strong is the backing of some of the schemes that a newspaper assumes a heavy risk in excluding them. The business is often placed by reputable agencies, from which we receive large quantities of other advertising, and they thoroughly believe in the schemes or they would not handle them. Yet it is necessary, in maintaining the standard of advertising honor which *The North American* has set up, to run the risk of offending these agencies by closing our columns to announcements which they offer in good faith.

Recent action by *The North American* illustrates the cost of governing the advertising columns by the same rules as the editorial columns.

One of the most liberal users of advertising space in the country is a financier who is widely known, who has the confidence of many thousands of persons and who performed a public service a few years ago in exposing the misuse of the people's savings by the financial powers of Wall street. In a recent advertising campaign he bought heavily of newspaper



space for elaborate announcements concerning a financial plan which he was formulating. The North American published his preliminary announcements. It was impossible to tell at that time what plan the promoter had in mind. Surface indications were that it was a legitimate investment proposition.

Finally he made known, however, that he wished the people to intrust money to him for use in an enormous stock-gambling campaign. Immediately The North American declined to publish his advertisements.

Why? He was not engaged in a swindle, nor is he a fly-by-night operator. There was nothing to show that he could not carry out his skilfully phrased promises. Yet The North American could not consistently forward his scheme, even through its advertising columns. Holding the confidence of its readers, and standing for the principles which it has maintained, it would not be a party to leading those who trust it to invest in a gambling enterprise, however "square" the project may be.

Other newspapers do exploit the scheme, at so much per line. But to this day the advertisements, which come regularly to The North American, are filed away in our business office, with the orders for the insertions marked "declined."

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Again, mining propositions of the doubtful sort find no room in The North American's columns. There once were many of these projects which were legitimate, and this paper carried their announcements; but with the period of wildcat promotion of a few years ago came such a host of swindling inflations that The North American made an investigation of the mining fields, and decided to exclude this profitable class of advertising.

Similar action was taken in regard to the promotion of the oil companies which had a mushroom development two or three years ago. One of them, which assumed a name that seemed to indicate government sanction and was exploited as the people's defense against monopoly, was exposed by *The North American* and smashed by the law—after it had bought from newspapers thousands of dollars' worth of advertising space.

Another case was that of a great railroad scheme, exploited in full-page advertisements. Every line of this advertising was excluded from *The North American*, although the promoters—among them men of good standing in their communities—urged and argued and even threatened in their efforts to buy space in this newspaper.

So it came about that the bars were put up against all promotion schemes of this character. Projects which break into *The North American* advertising columns nowadays must stand an acid test.

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We have cited some of the important and profitable advertising which is excluded by the management; *The North American* suffers additional loss—also on account of its policy—through the withholding of advertising by persons who resent the policy.

It should be noted that this business is not placed by advertising experts, whose judgment is keen and impartial, but by men, chiefly financiers, who act from personal motives. Unable to understand the injury they do themselves, they withhold their advertising from *The North American* as a matter of revenge; because schemes of public plunder having their roots in financial institutions are exposed and attacked by the newspaper; because they want to strike back at the journal which has shown that they are a detriment to the community.



Another loss, and a very heavy one, has resulted from The North American's stand for local option. Liquor advertising has departed from it. The breweries and distilleries and allied interests have long withdrawn all patronage from this newspaper. The North American's columns are not yet closed against liquor advertising—they cannot be, consistently, while the traffic is legal and while the paper upholds local option rather than prohibition; but we do not solicit the business and do not want it. Hence, we are in agreement upon one question, at least, with the liquor interests.

Their campaign, by the way, has been thorough. Ere the last beer and whisky announcements had disappeared pressure so strong had been brought to bear upon associated industries that they, too, withdrew. Hotels in which the principal feature is the bar do not advertise in The North American. Makers of corks and toothpicks have been dragged from its columns. Nothing even remotely associated with the liquor interests remains except the proprietary treatments offered for the cure of drunkenness, the owners of which seem to have an optimistic idea that there may be enough "left-overs" among The North American's readers to make the advertising pay.

Beer and wine and whisky advertising, it need hardly be said, is very profitable, and since the local option movement began the interests have made it specially attractive to those newspapers which help the fight against local option by open support or by suppression of news.

Political advertising—the official announcements dispensed by municipal officers—naturally must be counted lost when a newspaper opposes relentlessly corrupt political powers. A Philadelphia newspaper might count upon many thousands of dollars annually from this source—if it has a policy which is acceptable to the leaders of the dominant party.

To summarize, maintenance of its policy by The North American entails heavy losses in advertising—not less, certainly, than \$100,000 a year. We are quite sure that were we now to throw open our columns to questionable medical advertising, to promotion schemes, liquor announcements and the other things we have mentioned the increase in twelve months—without solicitation—would far exceed the amount named.

It is a fact, then, that it costs The North American \$100,000 annually to maintain its policy. Can a newspaper afford such a course—especially when, as our correspondent the other day intimated, it is a commercial venture? Our answer is that no newspaper could, unless it could show corresponding benefits. A newspaper which is financially crippled is powerless to serve the public. It must pay, or it cannot be of use.

The North American has no precedent to cite except that which it has made itself. In spite of the losses referred to, it has carried sufficient advertising to make it pay a handsome and constantly increasing net profit for more than five years. The last year, in spite of financial depression, has shown no diminution in profits; we doubt whether any other metropolitan newspaper can say the same.

Advertisers have continued to use The North American's columns, and steadily increase their use of them. There is a purely commercial reason for this. The scientific, trained advertiser knows that a newspaper of such wide circulation among thinking readers, a newspaper which dares stand steadily for such policies as The North American's, which cost so heavily, is too important to be ignored, regardless of business rivalries or its frankly expressed views on civic, political, financial or moral questions.

He knows that a newspaper which has made 160,000 circulation while others have made trifling gains or have gone back-



ward; which maintains a policy in the public interest to the extent of excluding profitable business which is of doubtful character and alienating the support of powerful interests, yet which still shows a healthy growth in circulation, advertising and influence, must attract and hold readers who believe in it, in its policy and in the selected advertising which it carries.

In other words, the maintenance of *The North American's* policy not only creates a permanent and growing popularity, but it makes for purchasing power. Advertisers spend their money where it will bring them business. The advertisers of Philadelphia—where the science is most advanced and its experts most exacting—show their discernment of this newspaper's standing by their increasing investment in its advertising space.

The newspaper proprietor or business manager who examines this as a cold-blooded business proposition will see at once the strength of *The North American's* position. He will realize that a newspaper which has been governed in all departments by such a policy, which has suffered every possible loss due to the strictness of its standards and to personal, political and financial enmities, is more solidly built and is better equipped to ride out a storm than a journal with earnings made up largely from business which is objectionable or is conferred by favor.

*The North American* has survived years of trial and virulent opposition. It has been through the fire. And it has come forth from the test powerful, respected and established on a profit-paying basis. It is no longer an experiment, but a demonstrated success. The only question as to its future is how far and how fast its development will carry it.

Our settled belief is that every attack, every movement of opposition encountered by *The North American* because of its

fight for right, has added to its strength and to its assured prosperity.

We have built a newspaper which is a great public institution and a paying property; there is satisfaction in this; but no less is there a source of pride in the knowledge that the policy which has been profitable has been helpful; that while The North American has kept its honor bright and won material success, it has accomplished some good for the city, the state and the nation which it has aimed to serve.









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